



God Hears Her Podcast

Episode 132 – Becoming a Bonus Mom with Cheryl Shumake

Elisa Morgan & Eryn Eddy-Adkins

Cheryl: The testimony of my family is that the love of God still works. And the Word of God still works. So we can spend that time in prayer. We spend that time working on our marriage. We spend that time working on ourselves. We spend that time shoring up the instability that we can sometimes feel when our emotions are out of whack. We are not spending that time waiting, doing nothing. We are active in our waiting. And God meets us in our waiting.

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Voice: You're listening to *God Hears Her*, a podcast for women where we explore the stunning truth that God hears you, He sees you, and He loves you because you are His. Find out how these realities free you today on *God Hears Her*.

Elisa: Welcome to *God Hears Her*. I'm Elisa Morgan.

Eryn: And I'm Eryn Eddy-Adkins. Are you currently dating someone with kids? Are you married, navigating being a stepparent? Are you waiting to be wanted in a relationship or a situation in your life?

Elisa: Today's guest has been through all that, and she has so much insight to share with us. Cheryl Shumake is the author of *Waiting to be Wanted* and the founder of Stepmom Sanity where she provides help and hope for all stepmoms.

Eryn: Cheryl will help us navigate through waiting and share some advice for all of you bonus moms out there. I recently stepped into the role of being a bonus mom, and this conversation was so lifegiving to me. Let's learn more about Cheryl on this episode of *God Hears Her*.

Cheryl: I actually was the product of teenage parents. So, my parents were teens. I have had a blended family my entire life. And the good thing is that my grandmothers were very good friends. And so the family grew up together, and I never felt without. And my mother did an exceptional job as a teenage mom, I must say. And I got married my...the first time my junior year in college. And of course, I wasn't godhearsher.org



expecting to 17 years down the road get divorced. But I will tell you the journey to that. I remember when I first started walking with the Lord, I was in prayer. And I just felt impressed upon my heart the Lord say, *I'm going to make you a rose before My throne.* And I had no clue what that meant. And we fast-forward some years later, I am leading worship in a church. And the pastor calls me up, and he says, "Cheryl, the Lord told me to tell you He's gonna make you a rose before His throne." So, he's confirming, right, what...

Elisa: Goosebumps, yeah.

Cheryl: ...the Lord had told me like years before. But the next thing I hear, Eryn and Elisa, is that a rose smells sweetest when the petals have been crushed. And again, I did not know what that meant, but I certainly did not like the sound of it. And then we fast-forward some few years later, I'm now the mom of a 10-year-old. I had been married at that point for about 15 and a half years. And the Lord tells me that something is coming to attack my marriage. And my husband at the time, he came back to me. And he told me that he had ran into a woman that he used to date before he knew me in college and that she had been pursuing him. But he told her he was happily married and that that was the end of it. So I thought, well, you know, thank you, Lord, for telling me and telling me how to pray. And we're all done, and we can move on. That was just the tip of the iceberg. What began after that was just a year and a half of this horrible, horrendous experience in my life and in the life of my daughter. But in the middle of this, I will tell you, I would go through it again for how I know God today. It was just an amazing experience of getting to know the Lord. And in the middle of this, I was in a bookstore. And the Lord told me to pick up this book by Nancy DeMoss. And it was called *Brokenness*. And in the middle of the book, she starts talking about a r...a bouquet of roses and how you can walk up on the bouquet of roses, and it smells so sweet. But when you crush the petals, it releases oil; and it just permeates the atmosphere. And I dropped the book. And I knew then that the Lord wasn't using this situation in my life to destroy me but rather to rid me of self-focus and self-direction and self-control so that I became Christ-centered and Christ-directed and Christ-controlled and that where I could go then...I could release the aroma of God. That's what the Bible says we are to God the aroma of Christ to those who are both perishing and to those who are being saved. And I got divorced, and the Lord kept me. And He held me, and He held my daughter. And I thought, *this is great*. This was the first time in my entire adult life I had been single. I was enjoying it. I was learning myself. I had been a *we* before I was a *me*. And I said, this is my opportunity to...

Eryn: That's a good word right there.

Cheryl: Right?

Eryn: Yeah.



Cheryl: This is my opportunity to become a *me*. And then the Lord said He was going to send a husband, but nobody would ever love me the way He did. And he, Jonathan, came along. Jonathan and I were actually friends in high school and in college. He attended my first wedding as well as a guest. So he's been at both—first as a guest, the second as a groom.

Elisa: Wow.

Cheryl: And...and we followed...you know we followed a path towards, you know, courtship and eventually marriage. And all along the time, I was praying and asking the Lord, okay, how do I do this? Because I've never...I had a stepmom. It wasn't the best experience for me at that time. I lived in a blended family, and we never talked about being a blended family or how that works. We just did it, right? But how do I do it in this role? Because I wanted to bless my husband and his children. And I wanted them to be a blessing to my daughter as well. I was still very protective of her. And along the way, the Lord...He taught me. He...He sent resources. He gave me strategies, and it was just another level, I'll be honest with you, of dying to self.

Elisa: So, tell us about your step-kids and what you have learned. How long have you been married now?

Cheryl: Jonathan and I have been married 15 years...

Elisa: Okay.

Cheryl: ...now. And so we have a little bit of history. And...and you know, these years I always say, these years count like dog years when you're a blended couple. So...

Eryn: That is very accurate, you know.

Cheryl: Does.

Eryn: I am really grateful for that statement.

Cheryl: Yes, yes, every one year we're married is equal to five for traditional...

Elisa: I love that.

Cheryl: ...marriage, I tell you.



Elisa: Wise. She's got wisdom.

Cheryl: So...

Elisa: Yeah.

Eryn: So, our honeymoon stage it popped at like dating three months in, you know. So, it was like...

Cheryl: Yes.

Eryn: ...it...I.

Elisa: Twenty minutes and that's over, yeah.

Cheryl: Usually one...

Eryn: Reality hits quick.

Cheryl: ...one thing that I think they...couples who are leading a blended family have to realize is that paradise comes at the end, like after the kids are out of the house and...and you've done all the hard stuff, and you're now bonded as a family. Now here comes the time for you to really honeymoon and enjoy one another. So, there's hope. There really is. But you gotta get to it, I tell you. Going in honestly, my kids are wonderful now. I didn't think so. I didn't necessarily think so at the beginning. But I, again, went in with this attitude that I wanted to bless God, that I wanted to please Him in this role. And to be honest, it was through the divorce that I learned how to do that. I wanted to rail against my first husband. And the Lord told me to treat him with compassion. And that required a great deal of sacrifice on my part and understanding that this was not about me and him. It was about me and Jesus. Was I going to bow to His...allow His kingdom reign in my life in every area of life? We talk a good game. But when the rubber meets the road, can we forgive? Can we really take off our shirt and hand it to somebody that's trying to take it with us? Will we go the extra mile when somebody is, you know, compelling us and pressing us to go that first? So, it became an opportunity for me to live this thing that I said I believed. And I carry that into my step-mothering into this second marriage. And it was difficult. It was very difficult. Because there are so many dynamics, Eryn, as you may have experienced. Or you will experience from children struggling with conflicts of loyalty to figuring out parenting style and how your parenting style will mesh with this person's parenting style. And you have the whole insider-outsider phenomenon, cause there's a shared history that you are not a part of that you have to honor. But you still want to be made to felt like *godhearsher.org*



this is your family as well. So, there are all of these dynamics that you have to navigate through and find your way through and to do so from the perspective okay, God, what is Your best for the people around me? How do I show up, is very difficult to do.

Eryn: You know, I'm so glad that you just...you ended with that. It's so complex. Like it's so complex that it, when you're in it, it's almost like all right. I don't even know where to begin to understand my voice to being able to selflessly serve. And then you are aware of the traumas, and then you're aware of the things that could be preventative, but you have no control over. And...and...and then there's the, what you said, like the parenting and...and then parenting styles and then loyalty. And so the times that you do get to be around your step-children, you don't know where to begin on influence in serving and loving. And do you make up for time? And how do you make up for the time? And then you feel the pressure. And I mean there's again, complex, so complex. Whereas like begin here every day.

Cheryl: Right.

Eryn: And sometimes it might feel...

Elisa: Girl, you want a manual. I feel it.

Eryn: ...I do. I just...I read her book. I was like, I need help.

Elisa: Highlight, underline, yeah.

Eryn: Yes, and I'm so grateful, because there is a seven-year-old, a 13-year-old, and a 15-year-old that I just adore. And I'm so grateful that they adore me, and we have a sweet relationship. In addition, I want to serve and love them the best that I know how. And I watch myself selfishness get in the way of that.

Cheryl: Absolutely, it's going to, yes. You know I...I would say let's go back to something that you said. You said *influence*. And I think that would be a very good place to start. Because we don't have positional leadership in the lives of our children. The parents, grandparents do. They have positional leadership. We don't. What we have to do is gain influence by permission, and that's granted by access to the heart. So really, what we first need to do is just take our time establishing a relationship, a genuine relationship with them apart from our relationship to their father. What are they interested in? What do they like to do? Let me ask about their day. And understand, we may get some pushback from that. So be patient as we're asking these questions as we're trying to establish the relationship. Understand that they're in a battle. They're excited to see dad. They don't necessarily want to see us. They know that we're part of the package now, and they're trying to navigate and figure out their place in the family as well. If they have

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experienced the trauma of divorce or loss in any sense of the word, then they're still grieving that in addition to that. And you now, Eryn, you now represent the loss of a dream. So, they have to grieve. Even as much as they accept you, they also have to grieve that. So...

Eryn: That's a good word.

Cheryl: ...I would say the first thing is be patient. Be flexible and seek to have a relationship with them. And let them lead that, and understand it will change. You know, you were saying that your relationship is really sweet right now. And I was thinking oh, they are young. They are not teenagers yet.

Elisa: Yeah.

Eryn: I'm starting to see the glimmers.

Cheryl: Right.

Elisa: And Cheryl, you mentioned that loss of a dream. And...and that dream is that their family would be reunited as it was? Is that what you're referring to?

Cheryl: That dream is that their family would be reunited as it was, that mom and dad would be together, that they would not have to experience this fractured reality, that they don't have to have two homes or two Thanksgivings or two Christmases. Or, you know, I don't have to be here with mom and missing dad. I know that dad is going to walk through the door, yeah.

Elisa: To respect that grief. That's powerful.

Cheryl: We absolutely must respect that grief. It's imperative. I would say that's a good place to start. The other thing, Eryn, I would say is not to be so focused on what the impact of what you're doing, stay in the moment. Like really stay in the moment. Because we don't know from day to day what is going to happen. Only the Lord knows the future, right? We...even if we plan it out, it's His purpose that's going to be established. So, what I can do is say, okay, what do I need to do in this moment here? I'm faced with this. What's the best thing for me to do in this moment? What's the God thing for me to do in this moment? How do I show up in this moment? Do I show up in this moment? Maybe I don't. Maybe I need to step back and be in the background somewhere and let them have this moment with each other.

Eryn: That's so good and affirming. Cause sometimes being present in the moment feels like you're not doing enough. I think that you can feel that wrestling in your spirit. I've recently been praying, probably the
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last year, I noticed I would have this anxiety of that I need to perform or do or be or be a certain way or act a certain way or have, you know, be...be chill, Eryn. Be calm. Be calm. Be chill. Or be excited, be excited. Okay, be excited. Be excited. You know like I would...I'd go through these emotions. And what I've been praying recently is *Lord, let me love authentically and be authentically myself.*

Elisa: Oh, that's good.

Eryn: Because I will start to act inauthentically, and they can sniff it out.

Cheryl: Yes, they can. Yes, they can.

Elisa: I feel like a lot of these comments that...that we're making and discovering really fold into your big idea of we need to wait to be loved rather than concoct some system that we can guarantee we are loved. Can you go into that, Cheryl? You know, what that looks like...

Cheryl: Sure.

Elisa: ...waiting to be loved by your stepchildren and why that's so important.

Cheryl: Well, I know a lot of us, you know, we are standing at the altar with a great deal of expectation, right? We have a lot of hope of what our family's gonna look like. And...and we see happy, happy, joy, joy all around, and we remember the dating season. But I always tell women, listen, of course I'm gonna love you when we're always going out for ice cream. But when you move into my home, and you start telling me what to do, that's a little different dynamic there, so.

Elisa: Yeah.

Cheryl: So, there's this big gap between what we expected when we got married and what we experience in our home. And between the gap, there's all of these issues and our own emotions that we have to wrestle with. And if we can shift our focus from what we're not getting to what we need to be giving as we're waiting on God to touch the hearts of the...of the children around us, it will give us a different perspective on our step-mothering. It will give us a different sense of purpose for our step-mothering as well. So waiting is not this exercise in futility. It's not you sitting around twiddling your thumbs. It really is asking God again, How do I show up in this moment? How do I engage with this child here? How do I show love? And we're talking love. We're not talking emotional connection. There's a big difference. We can do love. That's a decision. We can be kind. We can be patient. We can be gentle without emotional connection. But eventually, emotional connection follows when we do that consistently.



And I will say this, what I found in my life, in my family, the testimony of my family is that the love of God still works. And the Word of God still works. So, we can spend that time in prayer. We spend that time working on our marriage. We spend that time working on ourselves. We spend that time shoring up the instability that we can sometimes feel when our emotions are out of whack. We're not spending that time waiting, doing nothing. We are active in our waiting. And God meets us in our waiting. And while we are there, He shows us how to love children, not biologically our own, who may reject us, much the same way Christ loved us when He died on the cross for us.

Eryn: I would love for you to share more when you said the difference between emotional connection and love.

Cheryl: Absolutely.

Eryn: That's so profound to me, cause I think we mistake the two.

Cheryl: We absolutely do, Eryn. We walk into this. And we're thinking that if I don't feel a certain way about this person, then I don't love them. Or if they don't feel a certain way about me, then I don't love them. But when you look at the definition of biblical love, it is very action oriented. It can be commanded, which means that it can be decided to be acted upon. And so with that, I can actually do the act of love without respect to how I may feel about a person in that moment. And as a matter of fact, we talk about sacrificial love all the time. So, this is an act of sacrifice. Really it is, again to be patient, to look at this person and see God's fingerprint on them and believe the best about them and hope the best for them, to be very tempered in our responses to them, to not match energy, to all of those things are acts of love towards this person who may be rejecting us. The biggest difference between that and emotional intimacy is time. You don't gain intimacy immediately. We fall in love with our biological children. But even then, they've had time in our womb. And we've had time to get used to the idea of being a mom. And we are excited about that. With stepchildren and stepparents, we need time. We need time to get to know one another. We need time to build relationship. They need to be able to trust us. No love is given in absence of trust so that we have to have trust there. We need to trust them. They need to see our consistency. All of those things work together to build emotional intimacy.

Elisa: Hey, can I ask you to turn the...the whole topic just sideways for a second.

Cheryl: Sure.

Elisa: I think there are, and you referenced this as we began our conversation, that there are a lot of women who have a stepmother. A lot of our listeners have a stepmother. And maybe we're older now.



And maybe she came into our life early and actually helped raise us. Or maybe she came into our life way late, and now she's in the grandmother role unexpectedly to us to our children. What would you say to those stepchildren about...

Cheryl: Yeah.

Elisa: ...their stepmothers and how we can improve those relationships.

Cheryl: Sure, of course, being age-appropriate of course, I would say that she doesn't know what she's doing. She's trying her best. And she's not...she really does not want to take your mom's place. She's just trying to find her own place. So, if you give her opportunity, she might become one of a...the best friends you can have. Again, and maybe even another, you know, parental influence. But for sure, she can become a friend. I would say give her permission to be herself. Give her a little bit of grace. Cut her some slack. She's trying to find her way like you're trying to find your way as well.

Elisa: Wise, thank you.

Eryn: I had a conversation with one of my friends who has a blended family. And I asked the question, I said okay, now I'm trying to figure out like what words to use. Do I say *my* children, *our* children, *the* children? And then there's my head and my heart trying to connect those two in this new role that you just shared. Like she's just trying to find her space.

Elisa: That's a great question, Eryn.

Eryn: What advice would you have for that?

Cheryl: I would say, ask the kids. We do a lot of deciding for them in a situation that they had no control in making. They feel that loss of control. And they don't want to be put upon anymore. So, you know, invite them into the conversation. Ask them, how do you feel when I say, "my children, our children?" What do you prefer? Does saying "my children" bother bio-mom? If it does, maybe that's something that you shouldn't say. Maybe you should say "the kids" or "our kids" if that feels a little bit more inclusive to you but yet not exclusive of bio-mom. So, I would say have a conversation. Talk to the kids. Talk to your spouse and ask. Same thing with what to call you. One of my bonus children, she had asked the question before we got married, you know, should she call me mom? And my husband said, well we don't know that your mother would feel happy with that. We settled on Cheryl. And the way they say it, I...I feel the love the same. They are, you know, so it...Cheryl was just fine with me. My daughter, Kayla, she began calling Jonathan, Jonathan. She quickly made her way to dad. And he's been dad to her ever since. I



think it helped her biological father passed away a couple of years after we were divorced. And I think not having him in the picture kind of helped her make that transition honestly. But yeah, same thing with that. Ask the kids and take into consideration the feelings of your extended family.

Elisa: That's so good.

Eryn: Cheryl, I am like an observer. Sometimes I feel like I'm a fly on the wall, and I'm just watching everything go down. And sometimes I'm in the thick of it, and I'm...I'm in it with my husband. I can sense though there are times where I want to maybe speak in more than maybe I should.

Elisa: Give him some advice.

Eryn: Yeah, give him some advice on his children. And right? And...

Cheryl: Yeah, yes.

Eryn: ...then there are sometimes where I'm like I want to protect him cause I see it oh no. If you say that, I know that she's going to [da la la] you know. How can you support your husband and empower his voice? When do you know to step back? Can you speak into that?

Cheryl: One of the first things that I would say is that understand that your husband feels like he's the man in the middle. He is not happy about not seeing his children. And when they come, there are probably some parenting decisions that he's going to make based on the fact that he hasn't seen them that you're...you're not gonna agree with. It's just gonna happen. I would say if you see something, definitely you don't want to intervene. If he doesn't step up, don't you step in. You kind of just kind of lean back and, as you say, observe and pray. And ask the Lord for the opportunity to coach, to maybe give an opinion, but don't criticize his parenting. Don't make it a situation where he feels like he has to choose your way or his way or that he has to choose you over the children or anything like that. Just be very prayerful. Be very honoring of the relationship that he has with his children, the prior relationship. If, again this is age appropriate, if...understand that if you are coming into this; and they are adult children, there are probably 28, 30 years of dysfunction and relating in a specific way, dynamics that you're just not gonna change.

Eryn: Yeah.

Cheryl: So you're just gonna have to learn how to accept some things as well.



Eryn: There's relief in that too.

Cheryl: There's a lot of relief that you...

Elisa: Wise, yeah.

Cheryl: ...that you don't have to control this. Oh, my goodness. Are you kidding me? Oh great.

Elisa: People who are dating those with children, maybe can you just speak to that circumstance? Because you know some of us may just check a person off. But can you...can you speak to that a little bit for us?

Cheryl: Yeah, I will. I will say this, that you are likely going to come last while you're dating. And you're not going to be a priority during that time, and nor should you be. There's not a covenant. There's not a commitment beyond we're getting to know one another. Of course, that changes and that shifts once you have become married. But while you're dating, this is just your opportunity to get to know them, to introduce them at some point to the children to see how they interact with one another, to understand that the way they interact today might not be the way they interact tomorrow. It would be tantamount to saying okay, like we talked about before. Where we have ice cream socials today, that means we're gonna always have this same kind of interaction. No, can we move this relationship along? Because the stakes are higher. You do have children that are involved, and they have to be considered.

Eryn: Oh, Cheryl, this has just been such a life-giving conversation. And the things that I keep thinking about are like when you said that's just part of being like, if I was in the car with you, like I would...you just slow down the questions, right? And when I opened up your book, I was like oh my goodness. This is for stepmoms. It's also for anybody that is in a season of waiting. When I was reading it, I was like I was in a season of waiting in singleness after my divorce. And I was in a season of waiting within my career. And I was a s...and the way that you just empowered the individual to lean into their relationship with Jesus during this time. Like that is like what you said. You don't twiddle your thumbs around and just go well, I'm gonna take a nap until decides to come around. Like there are things that can be carved out of you. There are things that you can learn about who God is in your life. Would you maybe speak just some truth over us as we close that pertains to that? What can you do? How can you hear God's voice when everything is loud in this...in these moments of waiting?

Cheryl: I would say this is going to require some intentionality on your part to shut out the voices, to shut out the world, to say, you know what? I'm...I'm taking this time, and I'm getting alone with the Lord with the Word, with my devotional in worship. And I'm giving Him the opportunity to pour into my heart like I
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know He wants to. Nothing is purposeless in your life. You have been brought to the position that you're in as a stepmother because you are God's hero in your family. And He wants to use you in that family to draw those children, to draw even your...your husband's former spouse to the Lord. But in order for Him to do that, He wants to first draw you to Himself. So, while you are in this period of waiting for hearts to be turned towards you, release your desires to the Lord. People are not equipped to hold the weight of worship. That belongs to God and to God alone. So, give your desires over to Him. They're not wrong. He just doesn't want you to make an idol out of them. So, you definitely want to do that. I would say also that, as you are praying and as you are surrendering and as you are dying to self, and as you are learning and navigating, that expect joy. You really do. This really is a joyful journey. It really is. As much as we have talked about some of the hard stuff, there's a great deal of joy that comes out of loving and...and creating a safe space for the people in your life. I have been extremely blessed by the things that my bonus children are saying to me today as a result of the years of sowing that I did in their lives, things that I never would have thought I would ever hear. It has blessed me today. So, I want to encourage you like out of Galatians. "Do not be weary in well-doing. For in due season, you will reap if you do not faint."

[music]

Elisa: Sowing the seeds in a relationship may take years. But the harvest at the end is so worth it when it comes to growing with the people around us.

Eryn: I am so thankful for Cheryl. Well, before we go, be sure to check out our website to find a link for Cheryl's book *Waiting to Be Wanted*. You can find that and a link to join our email list on our website at godhearsher.org. That's godhearsher.org.

Elisa: Thanks for joining us. And don't forget, God hears you. He sees you, and He loves you because you are His.

Eryn: Today's episode was engineered by Anne Stevens and produced by Jade Gustman and Mary Jo Clark. We also want to thank Emily and Josh for all their help and support. Thanks everyone.

Elisa: *God Hears Her* is a production of Our Daily Bread Ministries.